

ACCOMPANIMENT AND WELCOME:

The Jesuit Refugee Service and its Pastoral Role

Precis: Ignatian spirituality shapes the work with refugees into a pastoral work, the author explains. The spirituality, first of all, forms companions: being with rather than doing for. It keeps members available and ready for change. It asks the team to discern. Its first act with refugees is listening. It expects the Spirit to be moving in each and in all. More: ignatian spirituality demands that Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) help all, not only Christians, and even those who are illegal. These paragraphs were written by the author for publication in a JRS bulletin. They are reprinted here as demonstrating ignatian spirituality doing justice, to the hurt and the oppressed, in extreme circumstances. Some more technical paragraphs were omitted, as indicated in the text.

Being a Refugee Once you come to know the suffering of refugees, a pastoral approach makes sense. Many refugees are in shock. Many carry a deep sense of loss and grief. Many are humiliated, afraid, anxious, depressed or disoriented. Many feel wronged. They have suffered atrocities—or committed them. Their tension is great. They are people on the alert, sceptical, often suspicious. Family structure is often destroyed. Fathers may still be at war or were killed somewhere. Refugee settlements are health traps. In them there is often over-dependency, corruption, injustice, and deceit. Among those suffering loneliness, abandonment, and

life in cramped living conditions, promiscuity is likely. Morale and morality are easily lost or abandoned.

Yet one still finds great determination to keep families together. Always the longing for integrity. There is heroic courage and readiness to forgive. One act of forgiveness can redeem and save a settlement of twenty thousand people. We have found many reasons to accompany such people— and to delight in doing so. Knowing their suffering, a pastoral approach makes sense.

Announcing a JRS Vision

Pastoral service is at the heart of the JRS mission. So it is surprising that during its eighteen-year life little has been written about its pastoral methodology. A 'Pastoral Vision' statement written by a small JRS group in Nairobi early in 1998 is a valuable starting point. So too are the reports and reflections of JRS field workers, for understanding JRS' own style of pastoral service. True, many aspects will seem obvious to those with field experience, but it is important to articulate our shared vision.

In a letter written on 14 November 1980, his birthday, Father Pedro Arrupe announced the formation of JRS, explaining that "the help needed is not only material: in a special way the Society is being called to render a service that is human, pedagogical and spiritual."

In his "Review of the Jesuit Refugee Service" ten years later, his successor as Jesuit Superior General, Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, provided JRS with its theological rationale and at the same time issued a caution:

Because Christ chose to express his love for us by walking the road into exile and, later in his life, making the journey to Jerusalem to suffer torture and death (Luke 9:51-19:28), our service and presence in the midst of refugees, if rooted in fellowship with Christ, can be a prophetic witness to God's love for us and make that love visible and tangible to those refugees who have not heard the Good News. This witness is the pastoral dimension of our work with refugees. Direct evangelisation is often difficult because the many tensions and conflicts surrounding life in a refugee camp can easily inhibit a free response to the Gospel.

In the field our JRS pastoral role is exercised in three ways: in services that are specifically pastoral, by our presence, and by the witness that gives a pastoral dimension to all that we do. The conditions of flight (which may have been precipitous, exhausting, and either provoked by sudden violence, or carefully planned) and the place of asylum (whether in camps, cities or detention centres) influence the way we choose to witness to the Good News among the refugees. But our accompaniment and service are always pastoral. In JRS we are guided by the mission given to us, "to accompany, serve and plead the cause of the refugees and forcibly displaced people" (General Congregation 34), by our accumulated experience.

Accompaniment

Accompaniment is an essential element of our mission and our methodology. As Father Kolvenbach remarks in his *Review of Jesuit Refugee Service, 1990*.

The Jesuit Refugee Service is a modest venture, but it does claim to bring a specific dimension to its work which is sometimes lacking elsewhere. While always ready to help refugees in their material and spiritual wants, and also in designing projects leading to a fuller and more independent life, we try to place special emphasis on *being with* and *doing with*, rather than *doing for*. We want our presence among refugees to be one of sharing with them, of *accompaniment*, of walking together along the same path. In so far as possible, we want to feel what they have felt, suffer as they have, share the same hopes and aspirations, see the world through their eyes. We ourselves would like to become one with the refugees and displaced people so that, all together, we can begin the search for a new life.

To accompany means to be a companion. We are companions of Jesus, so we seek for our own companions those with whom he prefers to be associated, the poor and the outcast. Etymologically speaking, 'companion' means 'one who shares bread'. In reality it expresses the commitment made in the Eucharist. The quality of companionship is well illustrated in Luke's account of two dejected disciples dragging their feet from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and finding a companion in the risen Jesus, though they could

